



# PLANNING COMMISSION

Department of Urban Planning & Design • P.O. Box 27210 • Tucson, AZ 85726-7210

**DATE:** February 7, 2007

**TO:** Planning Commission

**FROM:** *Albert Elias*  
Albert Elias, AICP  
Executive Secretary

**SUBJECT:** *Grant-Alvernon Area Plan Amendment, PA-07-01*  
Alvernon/Lee – Commercial  
Public Hearing (Ward 6)

**Issue:** This is a request by Don Laidlaw, on behalf of the property owner, CS&Z Holdings, Inc., to amend the *Grant-Alvernon Area Plan (GAAP)* to allow an area designated on the Conceptual Land Use Map for residential and office purposes to be used for commercial purposes. CS&Z Holdings owns four contiguous parcels at the northeast corner of Alvernon Way and Lee Street. The two northern parcels are zoned C-1, and the two southern ones R-2. They want to rezone the two southern parcels to C-1, and construct a culinary institute, which will be part of Chaparral College, on all four parcels. First, however, they need to amend the *GAAP* so that it supports commercial uses on the southern two parcels.

A copy of the location map is provided as Attachment A. A copy of the zoning and land use map is provided as Attachment B. A copy of an aerial photograph of the site and surrounding areas is provided as Attachment C. A copy of the plan amendment application is provided as Attachment D. A copy of a portion of the existing Conceptual Land Use Map showing the project area and amendment site is provided as Attachment E-1.

**Recommendation:** Staff recommends the Planning Commission (Commission) forward this item to the Mayor and Council with a recommendation to amend the *Grant-Alvernon Area Plan* Conceptual Land Use Map to allow office, commercial and high-density residential uses on the amendment site, as requested by the applicant. Copies of the proposed Conceptual Land Use Maps are provided as Attachments E-2 and E-3.

**Grant-Alvernon Area Plan, Background Information:** The *GAAP* was adopted in September 1999, for an area bounded by Fort Lowell and Grant Roads on the north, Speedway Boulevard on the south, Columbus and Swan Road on the east, and Country Club on the west. Development occurred generally from the mid 1940's, near Speedway and Country Club, to the early 1960's, near Fort Lowell and Columbus, with newer townhomes constructed near Fort Lowell and Columbus in the late 1970's.

The predominant land use in the plan area is medium-density single-family residential, in the interior of neighborhoods and along some of the major streets; and office, commercial, and high-density residential along the arterials. As in much of the Mid-City area, this area is experiencing a conversion of low- to medium-density residential development along arterial streets to commercial and office uses, due to increased vehicular traffic and related issues.

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Since it was adopted, this plan has been amended twice. In November 2000, an amendment and subsequent rezoning allowed the expansion of commercial uses along Alvernon at Fairmount Street, one block south of the subject site (C9-01-03, Assistance League of Tucson, R-3 to C-1). That amendment was similar to the one currently proposed. The other amendment allowed Tucson Botanical Gardens to expand eastward as a special exception cultural use in the R-1 zone.

**Public Contact:** As of January 29, 2007, one person interested in the amendment proposal asked for copies of the study session and public hearing communications.

**Planning Commission Study Session (January 18, 2007):** Issues raised by the Commission included 1) the feasibility of crafting the plan amendment so that it would limit the type of C-1 use allowed on the site; 2) who would enforce the land use covenant referenced in the application (no drive-through facilities; business hours of operation would not extend past 10:00 P.M.; and no bars, liquor stores or nightclubs); 3) why this educational use requires commercial zoning, yet the other plan amendment on the agenda, also for an educational use, requires office zoning (Fleur de Lis, Swan Road); 4) if the reference to a traffic calming device for the neighborhood is the traffic circle at Lee and Sycamore (yes); and 5) if additional shade trees could be provided in the parking lot to counter the “urban heat island” effect (yes).

Regarding limiting the type of C-1 use allowed in the plan amendment, Ms. Romero of the City Attorney’s office stated that the City’s position is based on the principle of uniformity of the application of a zoning classification, whereby uses in one C-1 district cannot be restricted and not in another C-1 district. Regarding the land use covenant, Mr. Laidlaw said it would be between the property owners and the neighborhood association, and that it would be up to the neighborhood association to enforce it.

Regarding the zoning determinations, staff subsequently met with the Zoning Administrator, Walter Tellez, to get clarification. The culinary institute will educate students in the profession of cooking, which is primarily accomplished in a restaurant. In addition to a lecture hall, there will be three large kitchens and a baking kitchen, all with commercial cooking equipment. Relatively large quantities of food will be delivered to the site, and relatively large quantities of garbage will be generated at the site. The site will function more like a restaurant than an office. Also, there will be a coffee shop and an outdoor café, which require commercial zoning. For these reasons, commercial zoning is required.

## **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Existing Zoning and Land Use:**

Alvernon from Speedway to Grant is developed with miscellaneous commercial, and single- and multi-family residential uses, mostly in older buildings. The zoning, which is a mix of C-1, R-1 and R-2, with less R-3, reflects the land uses. Please see Attachment F, which is a copy of a zoning map of Alvernon and surrounding areas from Speedway to Grant.

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Zoning and land uses in the vicinity of the project site are shown in Attachment B. To the north of the project site are commercial uses in C-1 zoning along Pima Street. To the east and southeast are mostly multi-family and some single-family residences in R-2 zoning. To the south is Lee Street, and vacant, C-1 lots south of Lee. To the west are single- and multi-family residential uses in R-2 zoning north of Lee Street, and primarily commercial uses in C-1 zoning south of Pima Street.

**Policy Direction:** The City of Tucson's *General Plan (GP)* and the *GAAP* provide policy guidance for the proposed land use changes. *GP* policies are long-term, broad-based, and apply to the entire City, whereas *GAAP* policies are more narrowly focused and apply only in the plan area. A summary of relevant policies follows; Attachment G provides a complete listing.

*GP* policies support commercial redevelopment within the urbanized area if it is compatible with adjacent uses, including established residential uses. Conversion of residential to nonresidential uses is supported if access can generally be provided from a major street; parking, loading and maneuvering can be provided onsite; and the project will stabilize and enhance the transition edge. Expansion of commercial areas into adjoining residential areas is supported if a logical boundary can be established, and adjacent residential properties can be adequately screened and buffered.

An overall goal of the *GAAP* is to improve the visual appearance of the plan area. Consistent with *GP* policy, commercial development is supported if the primary access is to an arterial street. Commercial and office buildings are to be concentrated towards the street frontage when adjacent to residential areas.

**Analysis:**

**Conversion to Commercial Use.** This proposal is consistent with an ongoing trend involving the conversion of low-density residential uses to office and commercial uses along major arterial streets in the Mid-City area. When this area was developed in the 1940's and 1950's, commercial uses were generally located at the intersections of major streets, and primarily low-density residential uses were located in the neighborhood interior, and in mid-block areas along the major streets. Over time, due to increasing traffic, noise, fumes, and safety concerns, as well as road-widening projects that have brought the roadways closer to residential structures, lower and medium-intensity residential uses have become less viable along arterial streets. Typically, the residences are either converted to residentially-scaled office or commercial uses, or they are torn down and new structures built. Often, as is the case with this amendment proposal, two or more relatively small parcels are consolidated to provide a larger site that is consistent with today's industry standards, and of a sufficient size to satisfy current City codes and requirements.

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Compatibility. The project site is bounded on the west and south by public roadways, Alvernon Way and Lee Street, respectively. Vacant parcels south of Lee have commercial zoning.

Impacts of this amendment proposal will be greatest on the two single-family residences east of the site on Lee Street, and the multi-family residences east of the site and west of Sycamore Boulevard (please see Attachment C, which is a copy of an aerial photograph of the site and surroundings). To minimize impacts on the neighborhood, a transition in land use intensity across the site will be provided. The most intense use, the 2-story building, will be located near Alvernon, and, continuing east, there will be a parking lot and then a landscape border and screen along the eastern project boundary. The 2-story building will reduce noise and related impacts of Alvernon traffic on the neighbors east of the site.

Improved Streetscape. Prior to the acquisition of these parcels by CS&Z Holdings, Inc., there were several residential units in poor condition on the site, which have since been razed. Consolidation of these parcels and expansion of the commercial area eastward will create a stable and uniform edge along this part of Alvernon. Except for the single-family residence that adjoins the site along Lee Street, this proposal would expand the commercial area eastward the same distance as the commercial areas north and south of the project site. Development of new uses and a street landscape border will improve the visual character of and add vibrancy to the streetscape, and may spur revitalization of this segment of Alvernon.

Culinary School. To the best of staff's knowledge, there isn't a similar culinary school in the Tucson area. Although cooking classes for different types of cuisine are offered locally, the nearest culinary school of a similar type is in Scottsdale. Development of a local culinary institute would increase the range of educational opportunities available locally, which would benefit the community.

**Conclusion:** Staff recommends the Planning Commission forward this item to the Mayor and Council with a recommendation to amend the conceptual land use maps as shown in Attachments E-2 and E-3, to allow office, commercial and high-density residential uses on the subject properties, as requested by the applicant's agent. As Tucson continues to grow, there will likely be increasing pressure to convert low- and medium-density residential properties along major streets to more viable non-residential uses, and this proposal is consistent with that trend.

GP policies provide guidance for the conversion of residential structures to nonresidential uses, and the expansion of commercial areas into adjoining residential areas. GAAP policies provide guidance for new commercial development so that it will complement the scale and character of adjacent areas. This proposal is consistent with the intent of both land use plans.

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Construction of a centrally-located, modern culinary institute will enhance the educational opportunities available in the Tucson area. It is anticipated that it will help to create a more lively, visually-interesting and vibrant streetscape, and it may stimulate redevelopment in this area.

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Attachments: A – Location Map  
B – Zoning and Land Use Map  
C – Aerial Photograph of Site and Surroundings  
D – Amendment Application  
E-1 –Existing Conceptual Land Use Map (a Portion)  
(showing project and amendment sites)  
E-2 – Proposed Conceptual Land Use Map  
E-3 – Enlarged Portion, Proposed Conceptual Land Use Map  
F – Zoning Map  
G – Relevant Land Use Plan Policies